



# **PROTECT SENIORS**

Take a stand against **ELDER ABUSE**.

**YEAR OF ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION**

## **OUTREACH GUIDE**



# HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN GENERATE AWARENESS AND FOSTER ACTION IN THE FIGHT TO GUARD AGAINST ELDER ABUSE

## INTRODUCTION

Every year an estimated 2.1 million older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. And that's only part of the picture: Experts believe that for every case of elder abuse or neglect reported, as many as five cases go unreported.

Elder abuse happens, but everyone can act to protect seniors.

The Administration on Aging (AoA), an agency of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), is sponsoring the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention (YEAP)—from September 2012 to September 2013—to encourage national, state, and local organizations to protect seniors and raise awareness about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Alliances among local entities who have regular contact with older adults, such as aging services providers, health professionals, long-term care and nursing home staff, law enforcement officers, and others, can help improve the health, safety, and financial security of older adults. Consider starting an elder justice coalition in your community as part of the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention.

Community organizations and small businesses including banks, pharmacies, and grocery stores, as well as senior centers and community centers, can be on the front lines when it comes to elder abuse prevention. Your staff and members of your organization encounter older adults on a daily basis and are in a position to recognize and intervene in instances of elder abuse, as well as educate the community about this problem.

Pledge to protect seniors this year and commit to doing something in your community to raise awareness about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.



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**SEPTEMBER 2012 — SEPTEMBER 2013**



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Your organization is in a position to protect seniors by breaking the silence around elder abuse. Take the opportunity to hold educational events to raise awareness of this serious and often hidden problem and to promote dignity and respect for all older adults. Whether you choose to host candlelight vigils for the victims of abuse, sponsor town hall meetings to discuss the problem, or promote community outreach activities, this guide will help you raise awareness about elder abuse within your community and plan and implement your Year of Elder Abuse Prevention events.

Holidays and observances throughout the year provide organizations like yours an opportunity to raise awareness of elder abuse, empower the public to protect seniors, and generate activity and involvement at a grass-roots level.

## Here are a few steps you can take to raise awareness and protect seniors.

### April

National Crime Victims' Rights Week – Remind your community about elder rights by displaying a poster about elder abuse prevention. You can download a poster at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html). Start an elder abuse awareness group on a social networking site and encourage people in your networks to join the group. Refer to the social media guide at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html) for sample posts.

National Sexual Violence Awareness Month – Host a candlelight vigil in a community park or gathering spot.

National Financial Literacy Month – Ask banks in your community to include in their monthly bank statements a fact sheet about financial exploitation.

### May

Older Americans Month – Join the national celebration of older Americans and all they contribute to our society. Find out more at [OlderAmericansMonth.AoA.gov](http://OlderAmericansMonth.AoA.gov).

### June

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15) – Sponsor a World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event such as a senior expo, rally, or other public forum. Wear purple on June 15 in recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

### September

National Grandparents Day – Promote intergenerational connections. Work with your local high school to encourage teens to visit a homebound older adult, or partner with a local nursing home to host a barbecue or picnic.

### October

Domestic Violence Awareness Month – Host a candlelight vigil in a community park or gathering spot.

National Residents' Rights Month – Include an article about elder abuse and the importance of elder rights in your organization's newsletter, or host a community yard sale with the proceeds going to an elder abuse support group or community efforts to help older adults in crisis.

### November

National Family Caregivers Month – Sponsor a day of respite for caregivers in your community.

Keep in mind that other organizations in your community may also be participating in the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention, so reach out to your community partners to see if there are opportunities to work together to raise awareness of elder abuse.



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## Why Are You Hosting This Event?

The first step in planning a successful event is determining the goal.

As someone who works on elder rights issues in your community, you've probably found yourself in different settings explaining the complex reality of elder abuse, and championing the importance of elder rights programs. This experience may inspire in you many possible purposes for events during the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention. Some examples of event goals are listed below—but please don't let these examples limit you.

- Explain legislative and programmatic changes that were authorized under the Elder Justice Act
- Recognize adult protective services professionals who are working to protect seniors in your community
- Educate your community about the role everyone can play in preventing elder abuse
- Promote respect and dignity for older adults
- Provide a night of respite to caregivers
- Brainstorm with policymakers in your community about policies and programs you would like to implement to help prevent elder abuse

Only after you define your goals can you identify and take the steps necessary for the event:

**The name of the event.** We encourage you to use the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention theme, Protect Seniors: Take a Stand Against Elder Abuse, as a tagline for each of your events, but different types of events might require different names.

**The venue.** If you hope to have a highly interactive event with a lot of movement and noise, you probably should not host it at a community library. However, if you hope to have a quiet discussion about how to limit risk factors for elder abuse or make services more accessible to older adults in your community, a conference room in your local library may be ideal.

**The audience.** Knowing exactly what you are trying to achieve will help you to define and reach the right audiences who will contribute to, and benefit from, the event.

**The agenda.** The planned sequence of activities should be designed to produce the desired result.

## What Will Your Event Look Like?

A variety of formats are possible for your Year of Elder Abuse Prevention activities. The best format for your event will depend mainly on your goals. Here are a few event styles you may wish to consider. You can use these ideas as conversation starters with other organizers as you begin to plan your event.

**Panel discussion.** Panel discussions are an excellent way to get people to think deeply about a particular subject. They are ideal for complicated and multidimensional subjects, including elder abuse prevention. Panels usually include three or four people with distinct areas of expertise or experience in a particular subject. Each panelist builds on other panelists' ideas so they may educate each other as well as the audience. These discussions generally start with a short presentation by each panelist, followed by a period of facilitated discussion and questions and answers.

This type of event allows community members to hear from and talk with local service providers and adult protective services workers, as well as financial and legal experts, to learn more about preventing elder abuse. Participants can not only voice their questions, comments, and concerns, but also hear the specialists' tailored messages. Be sure to find a diverse group of panelists that will add interest and draw wide audiences to the event.

**Speech.** Events structured around a presentation by a keynote speaker tend to attract both audiences who care about the subject as well as people interested in that speaker's ideas, position, or background. Thus, expert speakers may attract a varied audience of people who are knowledgeable about elder abuse prevention as well as people who may know very little.

Featuring a well-known and respected speaker at your Year of Elder Abuse Prevention celebration could increase community recognition of adult protective services programs and also encourage greater participation and understanding of elder abuse. When choosing a speaker, think of a community member with a strong reputation and good oratory skills who would have an interest in speaking about the importance of protecting seniors. Possibilities to consider include local government officials, social services experts, professors from a local university, or journalists.



**Candlelight vigil.** A candlelight vigil is a good way to raise awareness of this serious and pervasive problem and show support for people who have been affected by elder abuse. A vigil will also allow participants to make connections with others concerned about the issue. A vigil in solidarity with victims of elder abuse can help encourage other community groups to participate in the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention.

Safety is critical; with so many candles burning, it is a good idea to alert your local fire department about the event.

**Health fair.** Health fairs are an interactive way to educate the public and generate community engagement in health-related issues including elder abuse prevention. In general, health fairs provide activities, materials, demonstrations, and other educational information. They also aim to motivate participants to make positive health behavior changes and identify opportunities for future health programs.

Coordinating a health fair requires arranging speakers, entertainment, and refreshments, as well as asking local organizations to sponsor and operate booths, exhibits, and demonstrations about programs and services. A health fair focused on preventing elder abuse might also include exhibitors such as bank managers talking about prevention of financial exploitation, or estate planners discussing the importance of planning for long-term care and preparing a living will.

**Town hall meeting.** Public meetings that allow community members to share their opinions are an excellent way to start a community conversation about an issue. Often, town hall meetings include an address from an elected official or other community leader. Many community members welcome the opportunity to influence community leaders in their decision-making and have their voices heard.



A town hall meeting could be a great way to break the silence surrounding elder abuse and elder rights. However, it is important to frame the topic in a way that will generate interest and enthusiasm to attract your audience. Participants need to know that their investment of time will contribute to results that will benefit the community.

**Chore store.** Chore stores—community members regularly helping older neighbors with daily tasks—can generate awareness about elder abuse on an ongoing basis while also helping vulnerable older adults to safely remain in their homes and communities. Elders who still live in their own homes may find it difficult to maintain their houses, or need help running errands. Work with a community group, senior center, neighborhood association, or faith-based organization to develop a directory of members willing to share time or resources at no cost or greatly reduced fees (for example, lawn work and small repairs). Circulate the directory to elders who may need these services. Host small events to show appreciation of the volunteers.



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## Who Will Attend?

Once you have determined the event's goal, it will be fairly easy to identify your audience. Keep people's interests and schedules in mind as you plan and promote your event. For example, if you would like to have a policy brainstorm with members of your county's senior services program, health department, or other social services and advocacy organizations, make sure there are no other policy meetings planned at the same time that would create a conflict for participants.



## When Is the Best Time to Hold Your Event?

Consider the potential audience members' schedules and the overall community calendar before setting a date for your event. There are several things to keep in mind.

- Are the sites you prefer available?
- If it is an outdoor event, can you rely on good weather?
- Will your audience be able to attend? In general, avoid planning events during business hours unless your event is a brainstorm or meeting. Avoid conflicting with major holidays (unless they are related to elder rights, such as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day) or community athletics events, dances, or festivals.
- Do you have enough time to publicize the event, plan the agenda, and obtain an event permit if necessary? Events held outdoors and on public lands may require a permit from the local parks or police department, which can take up to four weeks to approve.

## Where Will Your Event Be Held?

Select a site that is easily accessible to your audience: located near your main audiences' homes, convenient to public transit, with ample parking for people who drive, and in an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant facility.

Make sure the site is large enough to accommodate everyone, and consult with the facility's administrator to be sure it is equipped with everything that you need. The administrator should be able to help you obtain amenities such as a public-address system or seating.

## What Will You Need?

Different events have different styles; consider yours and allow enough time to plan an appropriate interactive agenda and order suitable equipment, décor, refreshments, and services. Communicate with the venue administrator to make sure you have what you need. Here are some items that are often overlooked:

- Digital or slide projector
- Refreshments
- Public-address system
- Adequate seating
- Writing implements
- Featured speakers or entertainers
- Decorations
- Candles (for candlelight vigil)
- Transportation for event participants
- Event insurance in case of an injury at the event
- A rain plan (if you intend to hold your event outdoors)

## Take the Pledge

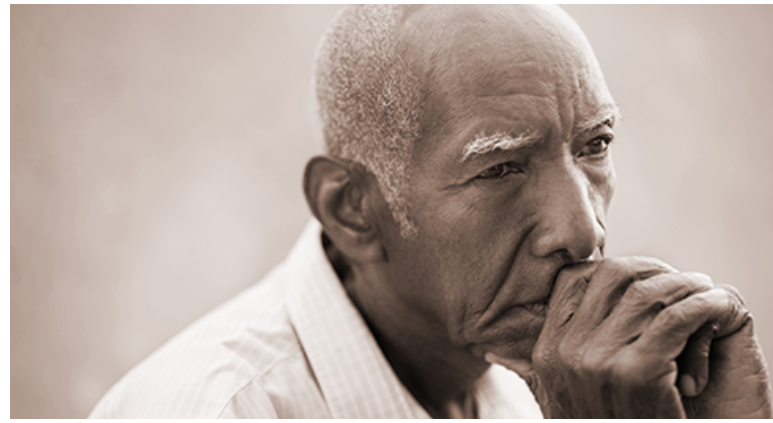
A key ingredient to a successful event is strong follow-through. Ask people to sign in at the door, and send a follow-up email to all attendees thanking them for their participation and inviting them to get more involved with the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention. Let them know one way to help is by pledging to protect seniors at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html).



## Outreach

Hosting an event is one way to generate awareness about elder abuse, but there are other ways to educate and inform the public about this issue and empower members of your community to protect seniors.

- If you have not already done so, get in touch with the program director at your local Area Agency on Aging and ask him or her to help publicize your event—if you are hosting one—or simply distribute messages about the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention.
  - Identify potential partners to help raise awareness about elder abuse prevention. For example, you could ask local banks or utility companies to include small elder abuse awareness inserts with their statements. You can find flier templates and fact sheets at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html) to use or modify for your inserts.
  - Start or join a local elder justice coalition. Alliances among local entities who have regular contact with elders, such as aging services providers, health professionals, long-term care staff, skilled nursing home staff, law enforcement, and others, have been shown to improve communication and coordination among collaborators and to increase protection of older persons' health, safety, and/or financial security. Contact the NCEA for more information about starting or reinvigorating your own local elder justice community coalition.
  - Hang the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention posters in as many locations around your community as possible. Pharmacies, grocery stores, banks, senior centers, libraries, bus stops, and doctors' offices are all good places to post information about guarding against elder abuse. Posters can be downloaded at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html).
- Use the tools available at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html) such as fliers, fact sheets, and PowerPoint templates.
  - Promote a discussion of elder rights issues by encouraging people to share their thoughts and insights on social media. Use the hashtag #ProtectSeniors. For more information on social media, download the YEAP Social Media Guide at [www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html](http://www.aoa.gov/YEAP.html).
  - Organize a letter-to-the-editor writing campaign to raise awareness not only of elder abuse but also of the local resources that are available through adult protective services, area agency on aging offices, and other organizations. Be sure to include contact information and hotline and helpline phone numbers as well as Web addresses for relevant organizations.



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## Art for Awareness

The arts are a great way to generate public awareness about complicated issues, including elder abuse, and to capture and sustain public attention. Consider incorporating arts and crafts into your Year of Elder Abuse Prevention activities. Here are some suggestions:

- **Quilt show.** Organize an Elder Abuse Awareness Quilt Show and Competition featuring themes related to elder rights. Entries may be solicited from senior centers, quilting groups, sewing circles, educational institutions, Scout troops, individual artists, and others. Mount the entries in a local mall and ask shoppers to vote on their favorites. As quilts are larger than life and eye-catching, they can attract a great deal of attention.
- **Clothesline contest.** Sponsor a T-shirt design contest or activity with a youth group or Scouts troop. Ask contestants to depict the themes related to elder rights. Display the shirts on a clothesline at a senior center, health fair, or other event.

- **Student arts or essay competition.** Young people are dedicating themselves to a host of social causes, and elder abuse prevention can capitalize on this enthusiasm. Work with your state's attorney general's office, division of aging, and department of education, as well as local newspapers, school districts, or other organizations to sponsor a contest on a theme such as: Why Should I Care About Elder Abuse? Use winning entries in local campaigns, and display artwork in community libraries and public buildings.

## For more information:

Check out the Community Guide to Raise World Awareness on Adult Abuse, developed by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, for more ideas on how to become involved. To access the toolkit, visit the WEAAD Resources (World Elder Abuse Awareness Day) page at [www.inpea.net/weaad.html](http://www.inpea.net/weaad.html).

For a wealth of suggestions on raising awareness of crime victims and their rights, download the 2012 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Resource Guide, online at: [ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw2012/index.html](http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw2012/index.html).

Visit the website of the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA): [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov), or contact us by email: [ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov](mailto:ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov), by phone: 1-855-500-3537.

## DISCLAIMER:

Some material in this document was prepared for the National Center on Elder Abuse by the University of Delaware and was supported in part by a grant from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (90-AM-3146-02). Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions within this document do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or DHHS policy.

